

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. CAPITO). Without objection, it is so ordered.

SENTENCING REFORM

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, there are many stories written in the last months about the dysfunction of Congress, why can't they get along, why can't they produce something, why can't they address the issues and challenges of our time. It is easy to get into that mindset and believe that something has happened on Capitol Hill that cannot be repaired. For those who are about to give up hope, I hope they are reflecting on what I left just a few moments ago. It was a press conference held up in the radio and TV Senate gallery.

Attending this press conference were Senator CHUCK GRASSLEY, who is the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee; Senator JOHN CORNYN, the Republican whip; Senator MIKE LEE of Utah; and Senator TIM SCOTT. On the Democratic side: Senator PATRICK LEAHY, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Judiciary Committee; Senator COREY BOOKER of New Jersey, a relatively new Member of the Senate; Senator SHELDON WHITEHOUSE; and Senator CHUCK SCHUMER.

We were there to announce what we think is a historic achievement, a historic agreement. We have been working now for years, literally for years, on both sides of the aisle to make significant and meaningful criminal sentencing reform and reform to the corrections system of the United States of America. On that stage, from MIKE LEE to PAT LEAHY and DICK DURBIN, was the entire political spectrum of the Senate. Within that spectrum, there are a lot of differences of opinion. There were times a year ago that I did not think that meeting and that announcement would take place.

But today we came together, on a bipartisan basis, to announce that we had reached an agreement, a historic agreement, on the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015. We knew we had a problem in America, a problem of incarceration. A nation with 5 percent of the world's population has 25 percent of the world's prison population. What is going on in America? Why are so many people in prison, and has it made us any safer? We asked those hard questions and came up with what we think is a good response.

We took a category of crime, drug use, that does not involve violence or a gun or gang activity and said: We are going to give to the judge in that case, that category of cases, more flexibility when it comes to sentencing. The minimum mandatory requirements can be changed by the judge based on the defendant before him, the crime they committed, and what that judge believes to be the best for our society.

It is such a change. For the longest time, years and decades, our goal was to incarcerate as many as possible, and

we did, some of them for extraordinarily unfair and unjust periods of time. The worst vote—the worst vote I ever cast as a Member of Congress was in the House. It goes back more than 20 years ago. A basketball player at the University of Maryland named Len Bias died from a drug overdose. We were called on to stiffen the penalties for crack cocaine in America and we did, dramatically: 100 to 1 for crack cocaine versus sentencing for powdered cocaine—100 to 1. The net result of that in several decades of sentencing was to send away primarily African Americans for incredibly long sentences. Eugenia Jennings of Alton, IL, a teenage mother and a crack addict was selling crack cocaine, a handful of it, to buy clothes and food for her children. It was her third offense.

When she was convicted, the mandatory minimum sentencing guidelines gave Judge PATRICK MURPHY no choice but to hand down a sentence of 23 years in prison. Judge Murphy said at the time: This country, this government, has done nothing for you, Ms. Jennings, through your tortured life, and now at this moment in life we are going to kick you hard.

The judge knew it was the wrong sentence. Fortunately, Eugenia Jennings' sentence was commuted after a dozen years. She was released from prison to be with her children, only for a short time. She passed away from cancer. But that is just one statistic, one story, and it can be repeated thousands of times.

This bill tries to avoid that type of injustice. We were not going to be a safer State, a safer nation if she served 23 years instead of 12. It made no sense. So we address it with this bill. With this bill, we go after a new approach in sentencing on this narrow category of crimes, which we believe can result in many serving shorter sentences.

Secondly, for those who are still in prison subject to that 100-to-1 ratio on sentencing, we give 6,500 inmates in the Federal prison system a chance to petition for reconsideration of their sentence on an individual basis, so they can be judged by judges, prosecutors, and people in the community as to whether their sentence should be changed.

So this, in a way, is a sweeping bill when it comes to the population of our prisons. I believe—many agree—it would be far better to take the \$25,000, \$30,000, \$35,000 a year it costs to house an inmate and put it instead into community policing, making our neighborhoods safer, giving our prosecutors the resources they need to not only come down with the right sentences but variations in sentencing like drug courts, veterans courts, and things that are working around America which will make us safer at a lower cost. We will have more money available to the Department of Justice and across the board to go after the seriously threatening criminals we still have in America whom we can never ever ignore.

Senator CORNYN and Senator WHITEHOUSE took a look at those in prison to determine ways they could earn an earlier release or better terms of release. They did extraordinary work. Senator Corey Booker of New Jersey stepped in on an issue that all of us who serve with him know he feels so passionately about, the African-American incarceration rate and particularly the impact it has on young people in that part of our population. He made some valuable contributions to this bill.

It is our hope we can bring this bill to the Senate Judiciary Committee soon. Senator GRASSLEY gave his word that would happen, and then bring it to the floor and send it to the House.

For those who say, "What is going to happen over there, with all of the changes taking place?" I would make one observation: Our spectrum of political support for the bill we had at the press conference represents the spectrum in the House as well. All of us came together. All of them can come together too. They may not agree with every word in this bill. Having served in the House, I am sure they won't. But if they will make the same good-faith effort at finding reasonable compromise, then we can reach a historic achievement, a historic outcome in this process.

I wish to commend one member of my staff in particular who has devoted more hours than I could ever count to make this a reality. His name is Joe Zogby. He is my lead counsel on the Senate Judiciary Committee. Time and time again, Joe Zogby has performed so professionally and with such determination, from my point of view and I am sure from other Senators' points of view. We wouldn't be here today if we didn't have staffers like Joe who have given so much of their time and their heartfelt dedication to finding a solution to an American problem.

So before we walk away from the Congress and say there is no hope, take a look at this bill and this effort. This is how the Senate is supposed to work. This is how the House is supposed to work. It is how Congress is supposed to work. It is how America expects us to work.

The President is anxious for us to come up with this work product. Let's not disappoint him and the millions of Americans who count on us to solve the problems facing America.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

9/11 HEALTH PROGRAM

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I rise today to mark a sad occasion. Yesterday, parts of the Zadroga 9/11 Health